



SANTA CRUZ—An Island Museum

CALIFORNIA has many fascinating byways. Some of them lead out to sea. Most of these cannot be gained by the purchase of a ticket. They are only reached through the kindness of their owners. Such is the course for Santa Cruz Island whose lofty ridges beckon from 25 miles out to sea off the Santa Barbara coast.

This island magnetizes scientists just as Catalina does tourists. It holds a treasure-trove of natural history. Darwin would have reveled in its endemic populations of jays, foxes, skunks, snails, slugs, and several plants. He would have found an island where new forms have arisen, where others have persisted while their kinds died out on the adjacent mainland in postglacial times.

Santa Cruz is a natural museum where bits of California topography have been jammed together on an island 24 miles long: jagged basalt uplifts; a stream transplanted from the Sierra; a faulted hidden valley; deep canyons with great oaks; cool slopes of pine; rich fossil deposits of giant oysters; diatomaceous earth; sea caves — and terrain that will turn shoes to shreds after several hikes. There are also human relics.

Adobes date from the Spanish occupation. On the venerable ranch in the hidden valley fine Cali-

fornia wines were once made. There is a wee church in a hay field; there are the kitchen middens — grave-yards of the Chumash, the only aboriginal tribe to build a plank canoe. And as you would expect, there are stories. Their titles — some darkly suggestive — are written across headlands and bays: Smugglers Cove, Hungry Man's Gulch; Prisoners Harbor; China Bay and Potato Bay—yes even Santa Cruz.

The island's name, according to legend, was derived from a priest's staff that had been left on neighboring Santa Rosa Island. An Indian found the staff and returned it to the priest. As the staff bore a small cross, the area became known as the "Holy Cross" but in the confusion of early charts, the name was transferred to the larger island that had originally been called "La Isla de Gente Barbuda" by an earlier visitor, Vizcaíno in 1603.

Wild boar, sheep, and cattle are also reminders of the white man's interest in the island. Some areas have been heavily grazed, yet much of the natural flora and fauna remain.

Those fortunate to visit the island may still wander through wild and intriguing chasms where the silence is only broken by the croak of a jet black raven perched on some lofty pinnacle. 🌿

← Sierra Blanca forms a prominent crest along the south side of Santa Cruz Island. A few pines cling to the rocky ridges.

➤ Relic of the Spanish occupation: This ornamented doorway was found in an old adobe at Christy Ranch on the west end of the island.

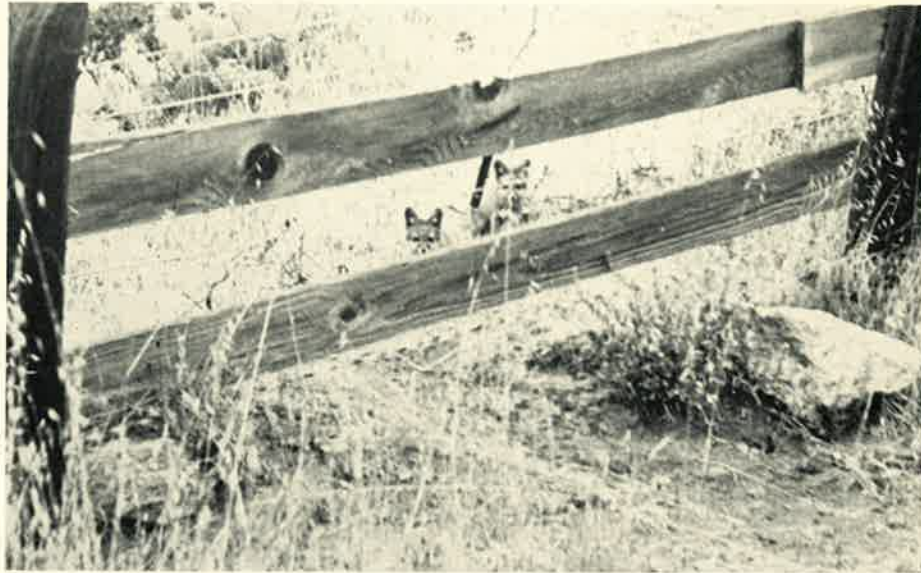
ψ A hidden pastoral valley lies along a fault which runs through the axis of Santa Cruz Island. Fine wines were once produced in this valley, but in recent years the island has become sheep and cattle range.

Story and photographs by
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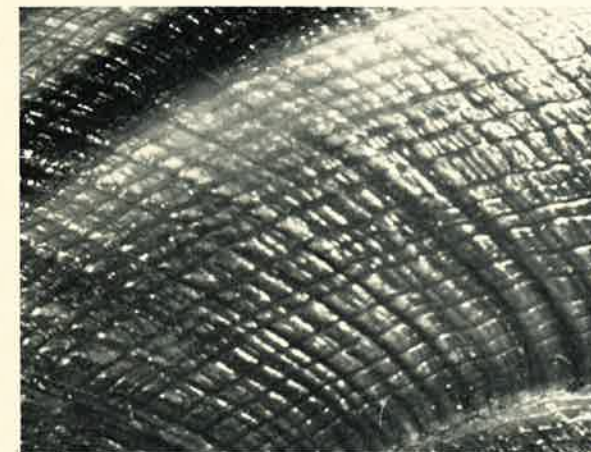


➤ Among the tall wild oats you will occasionally see a flash of brown and a bushy tail, then a pair — or perhaps two pairs — of bright eyes regarding you from some vantage point. “Cute” would tritely but aptly describe the gray fox on Santa Cruz, which zoölogists consider an endemic race. Their numbers on the island appear to fluctuate rather markedly.

ψ Stratified layers of diatomite (diatomaceous earth) lie along the coast of Santa Cruz at Smugglers Cove.



The Catalina ironwood (*Lyonothamnus floribundus* var. *asplenifolius*) forms luxuriant stands on Santa Cruz Island. The tree belongs to the rose family, but has no close relatives on the mainland.



Close-up of an endemic: photo (left) shows sculpture of the common island land snail, *Helminthoglypta ayresiana*, of Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, and San Miguel. The Santa Cruz form has been termed a subspecies, but even among its own separate colonies there is much variation in sculpture as the second photo (right) shows. The first is typical, but between the two samples there is much intergradation in the same colony. Since *H. ayresiana* has no close relatives on the mainland, its island isolation makes it useful for studies in speciation.